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Essay title: *Sine Dolore: Relative Painlessness in Shakespeare's Laughter at War*

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Abstract: How do we understand Shakespeare's invitation to laugh in the context of war? Previous critical accounts have offered too simple a view: that laughter undercuts military ideals. Instead, this essay draws on the Aristotelian description of the laughable 'deformity' and Plato's description of laughable ignorance in order to characterize Shakespeare's laughter in the context of war more carefully as an expression of 'relative painlessness'. It discusses how the fraught amusement of Coriolanus (*Coriolanus*), the reciprocality of Falstaff and Hotspur as laughable military failures (*1 Henry IV*), and the laughter of Bertram at Paroles (*All's Well that*

Ends Well) each engage with an ancient philosophical conundrum articulated poignantly by St Augustine: the requirement that a Christian civilization engage in war to defend itself against honour-obsessed aggressors without turning into a like aggressor itself. Shakespeare's laughter at war enacts the desire for that balance.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Christianity, Augustine, laughter, comedy, emotions

An old tension lies at the heart of Christian thinking about war. How does a Christian individual, ruler, or state balance the imperative of peace against the necessity of engaging in war, with all of its horror? More specifically, how does a Christian society balance the need and means for war against a duty not to exult in it nor to enjoy constructing an 'honorable' selfhood through the destruction of others? Shakespeare's laughter at war, I argue here, addresses that tension.

Among the theological traditions that influenced thinking about war in Shakespeare's world, there were of course pacifist approaches; however, Augustine's seminal ideas about 'just war' were much more commonly adopted.[1] For Augustine there were exceptions to the commandment, 'thou shalt not kill', including the case of 'just wars' waged 'by God's authority'.[2] It is, he notes (influentially) in *De Civitas Dei*, 'the iniquity of the opposing side that imposes upon the wise man the duty of waging wars'.[3] The Roman Empire may have grown, even by means of just wars, Augustine admits, and yet that expansion is far from being a kind of felicity:

> Let everyone, therefore, who reflects with pain upon such great evils, upon such horror and cruelty, acknowledge that this is misery. And if anyone either endures them [wars] or thinks of them without anguish of

> soul, his condition is still more miserable: for he thinks himself happy only because he has lost all human feeling.[4]

Augustine here registers two levels of war's pain. Not only are the effects of war a great evil but so is the very fact that Christians must sometimes engage in it. The fallen world is a tragic world. Soldiers can only address this tension, Augustine suggests, by fighting with the aim of creating a larger peace, and with the realization that 'bodily strength is a gift of God' not to be used 'against God'.[5] From an Augustinian perspective, a Christian is never justified in using the opportunity of war to exult in the pleasures of self-definition that military 'honour' can afford, as Shakespeare's Hotspur, Bertram, Antony, Coriolanus (and family) do, yet must bravely engage in war when the need arises, as Shakespeare's Paroles and Falstaff do not.

Each of those characters can be seen as comic distortions of an ideal Christian balance. At the same time, that balance itself has always sat uneasily with the political necessity of keeping men on the field, preferring death to 'dishonor'. Such characters – and the amusement Shakespeare generates with them – are partly situated, then, by the gap between ancient Christian and ancient Roman discourses of war. Christian discourse, and its criticizing laughter, locates a warrior's proper subjectivity somewhere between a Hotspur and a Falstaff, or a Bertram and a Paroles. At the same time, a warrior shaped by both Christian and Roman discourses of war is often in a position to be deeply attracted at some level both to the valour of a Hotspur or Bertram and to the love of bare-life shown by a Falstaff or Paroles. That duality of attraction and repulsion, created within the laughter these figures generate (so far as it is generated by Shakespeare himself), is a duality difficult to theorize; it goes right to

the heart of the differences between Aristotelian and Freudian approaches to laughter. Where Freud generally sees 'the joke' as an expression of the desire to free up repressed aggressive impulses, Aristotle sees 'the laughable' as an expression of scorn for the ugly.[6] Freud explains laughter's pleasure and Aristotle its proximity to pain. Both are important insights that cannot be reconciled easily: we are attracted to the laughable and repelled by it.

The complexity of that attraction-repulsion duality cannot be fully addressed here. What I want to do is draw on and develop one particular aspect of the discourse of laughter within the Aristotelian tradition in the sixteenth century, an aspect which is particularly relevant to laughter in the context of war. It is the idea that a comic space creates a kind of emotional distance, a relative painlessness, from that which is elsewhere simply troubling or horrifying. Renaissance thinkers often repeat the idea that the *ridiculus* (the laughable) is that type of 'deformity' or 'turpitude' that is '*sine dolore*' (lacking pain).[7] Such 'emotional distance' resonates in part with Henri Bergson's famous contention that laughter involves an 'absence of feeling', however, I think it is unhelpful here to go as far as to call it, with Bergson, 'a momentary anesthesia of the heart'.[8] How can 'the heart' not be involved in a laughter at war that teeters on the edge of its great pain? John Morreall has recently identified within the 'comic vision of life' an 'emotional disengagement', as opposed to the *engagement* that tragic visions create.[9] The emphasis here, however, will be on the emotional 'distance' of the comic rather than its 'disengagement' because I want to locate Shakespeare's laughter at war near the contiguity of the tragic and comic without relying too much on those generic categories at the expense of an historical philosophy of laughter.

In characterizing Shakespeare's laughter at war as an exploitation of 'relative painlessness' (*sine dolore*), I want to avoid two problems. One is the tendency to see comical scenes – such as Hotspur's and Falstaff's reflections on 'honour' in *1 Henry IV* or the gulling of Paroles in *All's Well that Ends Well* – as mere light-hearted and ideologically impotent 'comic relief'.[10] Second, I want to avoid conceiving of the comical scenes merely as 'undercutting' or subverting military ideals, as is often done in attempts to politicize laughter: the scenes as much *express* military ideals, to the extent that they encourage laughter at instances where the ideals are *de*formed. Ros King describes how Shakespeare's characters, including Paroles, apparently subvert ideals of conducting war espoused in William Garrard's *The Art of War* (1591): 'in all cases', claims King, 'Shakespeare comically undercuts the military ideal'.[11] Yet the question remains: on what basis can we decide whether Shakespeare is using Paroles to 'undercut' ideals or, rather, encouraging critical laughter at Paroles for failing to uphold them in the slightest? Both 'comic relief' and 'undercutting' are inadequate models for analysing how Shakespeare's laughter at war engages Christian philosophical debate about its demands and its horrors: those models do not fully address the emotional and moral significance (and complexity) of what is attractive and repulsive about his literary individuals.

An alternative approach is needed. Crisscrossing Europe in the sixteenth century was a complex and interrelated set of discourses for discussing laughter and the laughable, spanning humanist and medical intellectual circles.[12] *De Ridiculis*, by the Italian philosopher Vincenzo Maggi (Vincentius Maddius c.1498-c.1564) is a suitable point of entry because it usefully brings together some of the key Aristotelian and Platonic concepts being relied on here.[13] Maggi first identifies Aristotle's idea that the laughable (*ridiculum*) is 'a certain fault or turpitude or deformity without pain (*sine*

dolore)'.[14] The classic Aristotelian example is the comic mask: distorted but not in pain or causing pain.[15] However, Maggi moves immediately to note that it is with good reason that Aristotle added the phrase 'sine dolore': 'for if a person sees a face distorted from convulsion, they will not be moved to laughter but to pity, unless they are inhuman'.[16] There is a qualitative emotional difference between pity and laughter, to be sure, yet the difference (the relative pain or pleasurable distance) is located for Maggi in the relations between amused subject and laughable object. Laughter may begin where pain begins to stop but the one who laughs and the one who pities may yet be looking at the same face. What is horrible can be intimately related to what is, at another remove, laughable. This is particularly relevant to Shakespeare's laughter at war.

Another fundamentally important consideration is the centrality of laughable 'ignorance'. Maggi understands laughable 'turpitude' and 'deformity' – Latin terms derived from Cicero's glosses on Aristotle's comments in *Poetics* – in Platonic terms. He sees what is laughable as a kind of deviation from *natura*, from how things 'really' ought to be. For Maggi, turpitude may be of the body (*corporis*) or an external condition (*extrinsecus*). The more relevant category here, though, is turpitude or deformity of the mind (*animi*). To explain *turpitudo animi*, Maggi's Platonic cast of mind draws him to consider varieties of 'ignorance'. Maggi first notes Plato's interest in different kinds of ignorance in his dialogue *Sophist* and moves on to consider one particularly laughable kind. It occurs in a situation in which 'we know absolutely nothing about the thing we are ignorant of'.[17] That situation can be particularly funny when it is an ignorance 'of those things which are commonly known by others [*quae communiter ab aliis sciuntur*] and which are evident from their own natures'.[18] Maggi gives an example that might be found in many a Roman comedy: 'if some old guy

really believes that it is not indeed his moneybag that the prostitute has fallen in love with'.[19] The exemplary senex's magnanimous delusions are a laughable failure of the Delphic injunction to know oneself and how things actually are.[20] Thus, for Maggi, what seems like willful ignorance of what is commonly known and recognized very often raises a laugh.

One potentially laughable aspect of Martius Coriolanus's attitude to war and personal glory, for Shakespeare's Christian audience, is his complete ignorance of a Christian way of seeing war in relation to virtue. Of course, to begin here with *Coriolanus* is not to begin with a particularly funny play, in part precisely because its mimetic power is its capacity to create an early Roman world where such an Augustinian mode of self-understanding is obviously irrelevant. There is something akin to Coriolanus in Hotspur. Yet the scenes with Hotspur in act one scene three of *1 Henry IV* are much funnier than the foreignness of *Coriolanus* partly perhaps because Hotspur's subjectivity is made to be located more clearly within a *quae communiter ab aliis sciuntur*, a what-is-commonly-understood-by-others.

In part, the tragic structure of *Coriolanus* revolves around the hero's ignorance of the delicacy and oratorical skill a patrician leader needs to keep the *civitas* together. That ignorance is connected with his virtually cartoonish commitment to military valour for the sake of his own renown. It is not just his career that is at stake. His hyperbolic personal valour displaces ordinary incentives for war, such as expansion and defense, by making them a secondary concern; and together with his deep ignorance of the political arts of civility, such a 'valour' eventually threatens the very survival of Rome. None of those developments are very funny.

However, one small scene changes into comic gear and does so without providing any 'relief'. In act one scene three, Volumnia (Martius's mother), Virgilia (his wife),

and Valeria (another Roman lady) discuss Martius – before he comes home to be dubbed 'Coriolanus' – as well as Martius's and Virgilia's young son who has 'comically' shredded a butterfly after toying with it repeatedly.[21] I want to suggest that our sense that this is a comic scene – even if we do not find it very funny – is attributable to the fact that it is structured as a space *sine dolore*, through the prism of the boy, without losing for one moment its empathetic but critical focus on the broader culture of war in ancient Rome.

Even before the comic image of the boy emerges, Volumnia herself highlights the 'deformation' – from an early modern Christian point of view – of her own identity as mother, all in the pursuit of an honour stired by 'renown' (1.3.11). It is almost but not quite disingenuous. Shakespeare is posing the question: is this deformation of 'natural' motherhood funny, disturbing, or something in between? Virgilia expresses a natural fear of her husband's death (1.3.18). Volumnia counters that fear by suggesting that in such a scenario she would simply remake her maternal feelings so as to be happy with the 'issue' of 'good report' in place of an actual son (1.3.20-1). Now perhaps in a kind of trance, Volumnia exults in a vivid image of her son destroying bodies 'Like to a harvest-man that's tasked to mow', wiping the blood off his brow as he goes (1.3.38). In response, Virgilia expresses her visceral disgust for the blood that signifies the cost of renown: the ruination of other people's bodies (1.3.40). Volumnia counters the emotional power of that blood-signification with a grotesque comparison between the 'loveliness' of the 'breasts of Hecuba / When she did suckle Hector' and 'Hector's forehead when it spit forth blood / At Grecian sword, contemning' (1.3.42-5). The comically absurd comparison underscores the discomfort one might feel toward Volumnia's economy of renown. It is not perhaps accidental that her apparent willingness to exchange one particular life-defining part

of herself (a first born son) for another (a 'good report') is precisely the kind of exchange that Shakespeare's Falstaff and his Paroles will not make.

The ladies' friend Valeria now comes on stage and their reflection on Martius continues with reference now to 'the father's son' (1.3.59). Valeria says she saw the boy:

> o' Wednesday…run after a gilded butterfly, and when he caught it, he let it go again, and after it again, and over and over…Or whether his fall engaged him, or how 'twas, he did so set his teeth and tear it! O, I warrant, how he mammocked it!' (1.3.60-7).

Volumnia comments: 'one on's father's moods' (1.3.68). The image of the boy involves the same 'mood' of absorption and exultation in powerful violence as that of the father mowing down bodies. However, boy is associated with father even more specifically: through levels of 'ignorance', made comic in the image of the boy because of its lower stakes, and thus relative emotional distance. The association between boy and man is made not merely through their ignorance of (and contempt for) the suffering of other beings, butterflies or men. It is also an ignorance of the larger 'purpose' in violence that a Christian civilization – thinking in Augustinian terms – takes for granted. Coriolanus, and the boy who figures him more comically, have 'lost all human feeling' to use Augustine's words. The egotistical (and thus more broadly pointless) cruelty toward the butterfly renders (*sine dolore*) Coriolanus's own self-absorbed cruelty both to his country and ultimately to himself. Coriolanus's valour serves a 'renown' that he cannot even protect precisely because he is ignorant of the political arts of civility. That ignorance comes to a tragic and immensely moving end in the final confrontation scene of act five scene three. Volumnia finally persuades her son to desist from his attack on Rome partly by pointing out that his

total self-absorption in personal valour, expressed as revenge, will actually bring about its own self-denial through a notoriety for having destroying his own country. The scene is anything but funny, though its stakes are prefigured in the comic image of the boy who will grow up to be the same kind of threat. Intriguingly, Coriolanus, finally moved by his mother, immediately observes: 'the heavens do ope, / The gods look down, and this unnatural scene / They laugh at' (5.3.184-86). Of course, the gods have the benefit of further remove.

One might link Coriolanus's ignorance to the more laughable ignorance of Hotspur by means of an intriguing observation of Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra*. At the end of act three, Enobarbus, fearing the many consequences of his master Antony's waning star, has decided to 'seek some way to leave him' (3.13.202-3). Enobarbus states his reason: 'I see still / A diminution in our captain's brain / Restores his heart' (3.13.199-201). By way of further explanation, he describes Antony's attitude to war such that it is characterized as just such a distortion of Augustine's Christian balance, a distortion which has been seen in Coriolanus and shall be in Hotspur: 'When valour preys on reason, / It eats the sword it fights with' (3.13.201-2). That is to say, valour can absorb a person to the point of ignoring the very understanding that would preserve it, which everyone else can see. Thus it rusts itself. Unaccountable valour deconstructs its own meaning. This is a failure of the Delphic injunction 'know thyself', a state of ignorance that might be rendered tragic, comical, or tragi-comical, depending on the pain it causes.

Hotspur is a case in point. As Roberta Barker has shown, he has been read as tragic hero and comical fool, and can be read as both simultaneously.[22] In a much discussed scene of *1 Henry IV*, act one scene three, Hotspur, angry at having to give up his prisoners to King Henry, incoherently expresses both his rage at Henry's former

courtesy now turned to cold regality and his fantasies about leaping ‘To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon’ (1.3.200) or diving to the bottom of the sea to ‘pluck up drownèd honour by the locks’ (1.3.203). His overblown apprehensions are the more funny because they are spoken in clear ignorance of the fact that his uncle and father are patiently waiting to discuss ‘matter deep and dangerous’ (1.3.188), things which will actually answer to the younger man’s perturbations. Alexander Leggatt points out the absurdity of Hotspur’s unconscious self-criticism in these lines, for ‘an honour that has to be fetched from the moon or the depths of the sea is an honour that is lost’.[23] Audiences have also no doubt laughed for centuries at Hotspur’s puerile fantasy of tormenting King Henry – vexed already with Mortimer’s claim to the throne – by yelling ‘Mortimer!’ (1.3.221) in the sleeping king’s ear or by teaching a starling to speak nothing but that name ‘To keep his anger still in motion’ (1.3.224). These are what Vincenzo Maggi would have called ‘laughable deformities’ of the norms of the adult male sapiens.

However, there are levels of ignorance, too, that should be added. It is not just that Shakespeare’s Hotspur (so far as he is comical) ignores his father and his uncle or that he embodies an ignorance of the outdatedness of chivalric honour codes. It is also that he ignores (in so far as he is both comical and tragical) the ‘form of what he should attend’ (1.3.208), which is the fact that if he is going to survive politically, and establish the honour he desires, he must attend to the kind of policy that his uncle Worcester is trying to propose. This is a comical ignorance of *quae communiter ab aliis sciuntur*, a what-is-commonly-understood-by-others, glimpsed tellingly in his speedy and narrow gloss on Worcester’s machinations as a ‘noble plot’ (1.3.273).

While Shakespeare makes something of the same ignorance a part of Hotspur’s downfall in the later acts of the play, it remains comic here because of the framing

that renders it *sine dolore*. Later on, Hotspur's self-declared inability to 'flatter' and his defiance of 'the tongues of soothers' (4.1.6-7) means that he cannot distinguish when to use those arts and when to use the force of arms. His enthusiasm for the self-definition offered by the use of arms emerges in his reading of his father's absence as a 'lustre' (4.1.77) to be derived rather than the military disadvantage that most others see. The myopia is underscored later by Vernon (4.3.20). At this level, he is comparable with Coriolanus. However, act one scene three remains on the comic side of the spectrum because of the safety built into it. Although Hotspur is, as his father puts it, 'drunk with choler' (1.3.127), there is no real fear that he will 'hazard' (1.3.126) his head by going after the king to refuse the return of the demanded prisoners. In addition, responding to Hotspur's assurance that his rant is over, 'I have done' (1.3.252), Worcester's bemused mockery – 'Nay, if you have not, to't again. / We'll stay your leisure' (1.3.253-54) – signals that the scene is moving toward an expense of spirit rather than any climactic (and dangerous) confrontation. And yet it is the same 'deformity'.

E.M.W. Tillyard influentially characterized Hotspur as 'honour exaggerated', an 'excess' of 'military spirit', contrasting him with Falstaff's military 'defect', 'dishonour'.[24] However, Falstaff's famous reflection on 'honour' – 'Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word…Therefore, I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism' (5.1.131-40) – is often regarded sympathetically as a part of Shakespeare's questioning of chivalry and the honour code rather than as a comic distortion that expresses its ideals. As Quabeck notes, the sympathy is plausible partly because 'Falstaff rises after Hal's exit and triumphs over the dead honourable knight [Hostpur]' and so his parodic 'catechism on

the uselessness of honour seems to be confirmed as the more reasonable approach'.[25] Furthermore, his disreputable behaviour as a warrior – not only by misusing 'the King's press damnably' (4.2.13) but also by stabbing an already dead Hotspur in the leg (5.4.126-27) – seems to be a part of Shakespeare's questioning of the honour code Hostpur stands for: it has been overtaken by a living embodiment of the refusal to condone its meanings and priorities. Quabeck suggests that what is going on here is that if Shakespeare is expressing 'disillusionment with chivalry' as James Shapiro and Thomas Merriam have debated, he is not, however, therefore disillusioned with 'just conduct' in war.[26] Military values tied up with *jus in bello* (right conduct in war) have not in some simple way been 'undercut'.

There are a range of laughable deformities displayed in the honour speech that might have amused audiences across the centuries about Falstaff and his 'catechism'. These, too, are structured in a way that keeps audiences a step or two from pain, from *dolore*. Falstaff deforms, laughably, the virtue of bravery in a Christian kingdom by rationalizing his own cowardice in a manner that parodies not only a 'catechism' but perhaps also a scene from book XI of the *Iliad* in which Odysseus convinces himself successfully to stand firm on the side of honour against the impulse to survive, as Steven Doloff has suggested.[27] Christopher McDonough has argued that Falstaff's reference to honour as 'a mere scutcheon' – actually a piece of 'armament' itself and not just a 'decorative device' – situates him 'squarely in the classical motif of the *rhipsaspis* or "shield-tosser"', a pathetic, if empathetic, scenario in which the soldier gives in to 'the instinct for self-preservation' despite its shame.[28] Much of the 'honour speech' is funny – to the extent that an audience wishes to see Falstaff in terms of such laughable 'deformity' – because it is *sine dolore*: Falstaff's equivocations are only a moderate threat to his captain's enterprise. Indeed Shakespeare does not

position the outcome of the battle by making it a result of who has the right kind of honour. Hal simply beats Hotspur. Hal's political acumen does not help him, nor does Hotspur's exulted selfhood, when arm meets arm. The battle itself seems less about who has the *winning* attitude to war and more about what the right attitude to war itself should be.

Rather than decide who of Hostpur and Falstaff is the more disreputed, (and disreputable) or who is the more human character and who the more comic, I wish to pose them as 'contraries' of a particular kind, contraries that deepen Shakespeare's laughter at war.[29] Whereas Tillyard's purpose in contrasting Hotspur and Falstaff as comic distortions was to bring out Prince Hal as the real hero of military virtue – an Aristotelian 'middle quality between two extremes' – my purpose is to show how the ideal Christian ethical balance in a soldier's attitude to war emerges in their midst, rather than simply Hal as a specific embodiment of balance.[30] It is a middle ground distanced from both extremes of exultation and dishonour, yet is constituted in the reciprocity of their laughability, making them 'contraries' of a unique kind.

It is not the 'contrariety' that Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster link with clowning, where a clown embodies the heterogeneity especially of author's pen embodied in actor's voice.[31] Weimann and Bruster refer to the 'discourse of the contrarious' in the period as they develop their account of clowning, in which contrariety on stage is seen as a sort of 'transport' between author and actor.[32] In making that claim, they quote from Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, especially his understanding of the contrariety between 'laughter' and 'delight'.[33] Weimann and Bruster see in this Sidnean difference the contrariety they theorize in the 'transport' between clowning's embodied unpredictability and author's written word: that is to say, unscripted 'laughter' threatens with unpredictability – they read Sidney as saying

– the proper bounds of decorous comedy, which ought to produce 'delight'. That may be so. However, Sidney goes on immediately to explain the difference between the two emotional responses, of delight and laughter, in a way that introduces another kind of contrariety relevant to this discussion. Sidney says: 'for delight we scarcely do but in things that have a conveniency to ourselves or the general nature; laughter almost ever cometh of things disproportioned to ourselves and nature.'[34] To laugh at something, Sidney suggests, is to respond to something contrary, or disproportioned, to one's own ideals. To delight in something is rather the opposite.

Though Sidney keeps those orientations, laughter and delight, fundamentally separate, he inadvertently gives us a means of thinking about the contrariness of Hostpur and Falstaff, in relation to Augustine's conception of a properly balanced approach to Christian war. At one level, Shakespeare has made Hotspur and Falstaff contraries because each is a laughable deformity of one particular side of the Christian balance: Hotspur of too much military exultation, and Falstaff of cowardice and self-regard. However, a further aspect must be observed. In each of the two characters, what the Christian military subject of Shakespeare's audience may laugh at as being 'disproportioned' to himself and 'nature', is an expression of the same perspective that lends a delighting 'conveniency' to the other character – using Sidney's terms. In other words, what is laughably deformed about Falstaff is informed by the humanity and virtuous nobility of Hotspur. Likewise, what is laughably deformed about Hotspur is informed by the humanity and critical acumen of Falstaff. Each one's particular insight into the ideal Augustinian-Christian balance is an insight directly linked to the laughable deformity of the other. Laughter at and delight in these characters cross over rather than just coincide. The clever balance of repulsion and attraction in effect forges a middle space. Shakespeare invites laughter in both

directions so as to create a middle ground that resonates with a balanced Christian view of war as necessary but thoroughly repulsive, and thus tragic. Shakespeare's laughter at war engages a Christian philosophy of war, not just particular 'values' of chivalry, honour, bravery, et cetera.

In *All's Well that Ends Well*, Shakespeare refigures that crisscrossing laughter at-and-with Hotspur-Falstaff, with their contrary military failures. This happens via his clever pairing of Bertram and Paroles, in the interlinked scenes of act three and four. Through that pairing, Shakespeare makes Bertram himself the point of focus for considering the ideal Augustinian middle ground. Helen Wilcox has pointed out that integral to the play's 'tragi-comedy of war' is the fact that Shakespeare 'leaves us unsure of the grounds' for its particular conflict: the effect is that the ideals of 'soldierly honour' 'are firmly cast in the past'.[35] For Wilcox, Shakespeare makes an 'unflinching mockery' of the 'whole world of war' in the play, a mockery heavily dependent on the interpenetrating 'languages of war and sexual desire'.[36] In this play, laughter at Paroles and his failure to uphold military ideals is interlinked with Bertram in a different manner from that we have seen, for Bertram is not a Hotspur in the same way that Paroles is like to Falstaff. Bertram's shocked laughter at Paroles' becomes an potential agent in his own self-realisation, in so far as it invites him toward a more balanced approach to war via the legitimate claims of the social.

The pairing of Bertram and Paroles is central to that dynamic. As Robert Miola has shown convincingly, the two are 'moral identical twins', two sides of the same coin not least because they split the Roman *miles gloriosus* (braggart soldier) figure into two halves: Bertram embodies his 'amorous pretensions' while Paroles does his 'military' ones.[37] There are many other parallels spanning the two characters and the ordeals they face in the play. Most obviously, Shakespeare interlinks the scenes in

which Bertram is caught by Helen's bed trick and Paroles is caught by Bertram's men. The 'smoking' (shaming and exposure) of Paroles prefigures that of Bertram in the play's final act.[38] Also, at the beginning of act four scene three, with the plot to expose Paroles in place, the first and second Lords Dumaine discuss the despicable behaviour of Bertram while they wait for him to return in order to follow through with the plot against Paroles. First they make abstract observations about human imperfection and ignorance with Bertram in mind: the second lord, for instance, says that we are 'merely our own traitors' and, with reference to Bertram that, 'he contrives against his own nobility' (4.3.22, 25-6). A few lines down, the first lord wishes explicitly that in the gulling to come Bertram 'might take a measure of his own judgments' (4.3.34) to which the second lord responds with: 'We will not meddle with him till he come, for his presence must be the whip of the other' (4.3.36-8). If the proliferation of ambiguous pronouns here is deliberate, the effect is to jam the references to Bertram and Paroles together and emphasize the mutuality of the coming comedy that will 'meddle' and 'whip'.

The pairing clearly associates the comic shaming of Paroles with the (possibly comic) shaming of Bertram. Miola suggests that the 'daring strategy' of making 'a comic butt' into a 'romantic lead is not without risks, as the history of dissatisfaction with Bertram for failing to be a Romeo…shows'.[39] Yet Paroles' laughable faults are clear enough. Under pressure, he willfully ignores his 'friends', such as they are – though, of course, this is the sort of conflict in which, as the French king says, the young men 'freely…have leave / To stand on either part' (1.2.14-15). Like Falstaff, Paroles is also obviously a coward. In accordance with an ideal 'Drumme' – a vulnerable military position involving the use of a drum to communicate commands and good linguistic skills to parley with the enemy side – Paroles 'has a smack of all

neighbouring languages' (4.1.16).[40] Yet, contrary to the Drum's responsibility not to 'bewray any secrets known' if caught by the enemy, Paroles is immediately willing to use any of the languages he knows to do just that once he believes he is caught (4.1.72-74).[41] At the same time, though, and again like Falstaff, he is in tune with a certain kind of realism that the exultation of war, in its turn, ignores: 'Simply the thing I am / Shall make me live' (4.3.334-35). Just like the fat knight, this gives him an attraction parallel to his laughable deformity.

Bertram's ignorance of Paroles and, by extension, of himself is the primary structure through which Paroles' comic shaming is made to reflect back on Bertram. In both cases, what is ridiculous about them is structured cleverly within *quae communiter ab aliis sciuntur*, what-is-commonly-understood-by-others. As Bertram's fog of ignorance about Paroles clears, so begins the slower clearing of his foggy relationships with others. Accordingly, his manner of referring to Paroles softens slightly from 'What a past-saving slave is this!' (4.3.143) to 'I could endure anything before but a cat, and now he's a cat to me' (4.3.242-43). The reflexivity of 'he's a cat to me' is also a step along from the earlier confidence of 'He can say nothing of me' (4.3.119-20) and recalls the lord Dumaine's comment mentioned before (4.3.36-8) about the one half of Bertram-Paroles whipping the other. Bertram recognizes in Paroles a laughable ignorance of the underpinning responsibilities of the social bonds, which construct Paroles' identity. As that happens, Bertram himself is presented with the possibility of seeing – through his laughter at Paroles' distasteful ignorance and military infidelity – his own infidelity in love and his own ignorance of the possibilities created by familial and social bonds. The semantic duality of 'honour' in reference to sex and war here is key. Bertram's mother wants him to be informed that 'his sword can never win / The honour that he loses' (3.2.95-6). Miola describes the

link clearly: 'The word "honour" suggests the military standard Bertram upholds and the amorous one he violates, unmarking and marking him as a comic butt like Paroles.'[42] This is precisely why, 'the love of war and the war of love' that Wilcox documents, 'are interlinked in the play'.[43] Military ignorance figures amatory ignorance and thus one kind of laughable ignorance (Paroles) is meant to illuminate and expose the other (Bertram). Whether or not illumination actually happens – one can play Bertram in different ways after all – the invitation for Bertram to see himself anew, through the prism of Paroles' laughability, is there. It is an invitation to see the relationship between his military and his erotic self-hood in a more balanced relationship with claims of family and society, which underpin who he is. To see himself in that way would be to step outside the very ignorance that links him with Coriolanus as a distortion of the Augustinian approach to war.

Looking, with a laugh, *at* the prism of Paroles' deformed ignorance is plausibly much funnier to Bertram than looking through that prism to glimpse himself. This is because the former vision is relatively *sine dolore*. In the final act, the emotional distance of laughing at Paroles falls away and Bertram is forced even further by others to confront his own uncomfortable reality. Just as Shakespeare links laughter at Paroles with an invitation to Bertram to balance out the meaning of his own military selfhood, so he invites the Christian subject within his audiences toward a balanced view of war.

I have argued that Shakespeare's laughter at war evokes and responds to the difficulty faced by Christian societies that must at the same time engage in war – and keep men on the field – without eating the 'swords' they fight with by culturally endorsing military exultation. The laughter at Coriolanus, the laughter in-between Hotspur and Falstaff, and the laughter of Bertram at Paroles each generate and work

(rhetorically) to intensify the desire for balance proposed by Augustine. They normalize balance and intensify desire for it by means of the interlocking forces arranged between the characters of laughing at, laughing with, and, perhaps, laughing *from*.

Shakespeare's means of doing this involves different modes of constructing a laughter of 'relative painlessness', distanced from the painful and tragic reality of war, though in no way the less focused on its imbalances for being *sine dolore*. Shakespeare maintains a *relative* painlessness in his laughter at war in several ways. He displaces pain at shredded human bodies by refocusing, for instance, on the image of mammocked butterflies instead, and yet he keeps laughter on the verge of pain by focusing, too, on laughable ignorance that is sometimes close to military consequence (Falstaff misusing the king's press) and sometimes less so (Paroles losing the drum).

Furthermore, a laughter of relative painlessness in the context of war also implicitly frames itself within the larger consolations of Augustinian theology. The ending of the 'comedy' *All's Well That Ends Well* is unsatisfactory perhaps precisely because it leaves us merely with hope, rather than assurance, that harmony, forgiveness, and expanded vision will follow on from the uncomfortable confrontation. Augustine finishes *De Civitas Dei* with just the same inarticulate hope for *comoedia divina*. Writing 'Of the eternal felicity of the City of God', in which 'there will be no evil' and 'no good thing will be lacking', he admits 'I cannot even imagine it'; though of course he is without any doubt that it will come.[44] This is a thirst for the transformation of the cosmos, away from the sound and fury of perpetual war, that tale told by idiots, away from the tragic signification of nothing and toward the ending of a comedy, in which 'we will neither cease from work through idleness nor be driven to it by need'.[45] Shakespeare's laughter at war, as it looks backward, is

like Hamlet's jesting with death in the graveyard: a jesting without which we human beings could not 'face the truth of our absurdity'.[46] His laughter within war, as it looks forward with theological vision, is like to the desire for a good 'end' to the comedy.

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[1] For a discussion of the range and influence, see Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespare and the Just War Tradition* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 9-52.
[2] For the commandment, see Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17; see also Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.21.
[3] Augustine, *City of God*, 19.7.
[4] Augustine, *City of God*, 19.7.
[5] Quoted in Pugliattti, *Just War*, 15.
[6] I shall say more about the Aristotelian approach further on. For Freud's approach, see Sigmund Freud, *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconcious*, trans. Joyce Crick (London: Penguin, 2002); and for discussion of the ideas therein, John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 27-37.
[7] A prominent example features in the treatise *De Ridiculis* by Vincenzo Maggi (Maddius), to which I shall return. The treatise was published in the volume: Vincenzo Maggi and Bartolomeo Lombardi, *In Aristotelis Librum de poetica communes explanationes* (Venice, 1550).
[8] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 4-5.
[9] John Morreall, 'The Comic Vision of Life', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54, 2 (2014), 125-140 (127).
[10] A useful discussion of comic relief as a neoclassical 'chimera' may be found in Robert Hornback, *The English Clown Tradition from the Middle Ages to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009), 12-13.
[11] Ros King, ''The Disciplines of War': Elizabethan War Manuals and Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision', in *Shakespeare and War*, ed. Ros King and Paul J. C. M. Franssen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 15-29 (16).
[12] For a sense of the richness, see Daniel Ménager, *La renaissance et le rire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), as well as: Quentin Skinner, 'Hobbes and the Classical Theory of Laughter', in *Leviathan after 350 Years*, ed. Tom Sorell and Luc Foisneau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 139-66.
[13] The treatise was positioned in the middle of Maggi and Lombardi's co-publication *In Aristotelis Librum de poetica communes explanationes* (Venice, 1550). The book appeared in the context of a spate of new commentaries on and editions of Aristotle's *Poetics* across the first half of the sixteenth century: see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, in 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), Vol 1., 349-423.
[14] '*Ridiculum igitur peccatum et turpitudinem ac deformitatem quondam esse sine dolore*' (302).

[15] The relevant comments may be found in Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell, *Loeb Classical Library* (1995; Rpt. Cambridge: MA.: Harvard University Press, 1999), chapter V (1449a). Aristotle's word, translated by Latin speaking scholars as '*sine dolore*', or sometimes '*absque dolore*' was '*anôdunon*'.
[16] '*Nam si quis faciem ex convulsione distortam viderit, non ad risum, sed ad misericordiam (nisi prorsus inhumanus sit) commovebitur*' (302).
[17] '*cum de re quam ignoramus nihil omnino scimus*' (304).
[18] '*de iis quae communiter ab aliis sciuntur et quae natura sua sunt evidentes*' (304).
[19] '*ut si quis senex…non autem suam crumenam ab aliqua meretrice adamari crederet*' (304).
[20] Plato himself links laughable ignorance to failures with respect to the Delphic injunction in *Philebus*, trans. J.C.B. Gosling (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 47-50 (48c-50b).
[21] References to Shakespeare's plays are to the scenes and line numbers of the Oxford Shakespeare: William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, second edition, ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005).
[22] Roberta Barker, 'Tragical-Comical-Historical Hotspur', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 54, 3 (2003), 288-307.
[23] Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Political Drama: The History Plays and the Roman Plays* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 85.
[24] E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), 265.
[25] Franziska Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars in Shakespeare* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 213.
[26] See James Shapiro, *1599. A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), as well as Thomas Merriam, 'Shakespeare's Supposed Disillusionment with Chivalry in 1599', *Notes and Queries* 54, 252 (2007), 285-87.
[27] Steven Doloff, 'Falstaff's 'Honour': Homeric Burlesque in *1 Henry IV* (1597-8)', *Notes and Queries* 55, 2 (2008), 177-81.
[28] A *rhipsaspis* is a soldier who has left his shield on the field because it is heavy and impedes flight. See Christopher M. McDonough, '"A Mere Scutcheon": Falstaff as *Rhipsaspis*', *Notes and Queries* 55, 2 (2008), 181-83.
[29] Quabeck, *Just and Unjust Wars*, 211, points to the 'humanity' that Shakespeare gives to Hotspur, in spite of Hal's jokes about the 'Hotspur of the North' (2.5.103), which lends him part of his tragic pathos.
[30] Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 265.
[31] See Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance: Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[32] Weimanm and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, 29.
[33] Weimanm and Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance*, 29-30. See Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry, or the Defense of Poesy*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, rev. R.W. Maslen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 112.
[34] Sidney, Apology, 112,
[35] Helen Wilcox, 'Drums and Roses? The Tragicomedy of War in *All's Well That Ends Well*', in *Shakespeare and War*, ed. Ros King and Paul J. C. M. Franssen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 84-95 (86).
[36] Wilcox, 'Drums and Roses?', 88-89.

[37] See Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 122, 130.
[38] For a useful discussion, see Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*, 129-31.
[39] Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*, 135.
[40] See the discussion of Paroles as a 'Drum' in Nick de Somogyi, *Shakespeare's Theatre of War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 179-83.
[41] Giles Clayton, *The Approoved Order of Martiall Discipline* (1591), 17, quoted in Somogyi, *Shakespeare's Theatre of War*, 180.
[42] Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*, 130.
[43] Wilcox, 'Drums and Roses?', 89.
[44] Augustine, *City of God*, 22.30.
[45] Augustine, *City of God*, 22.30.
[46] Indira Ghose, 'Jesting with Death: Hamlet in the Graveyard', *Textual Practice* 24, 6 (2010), 1003-1018 (1012).